

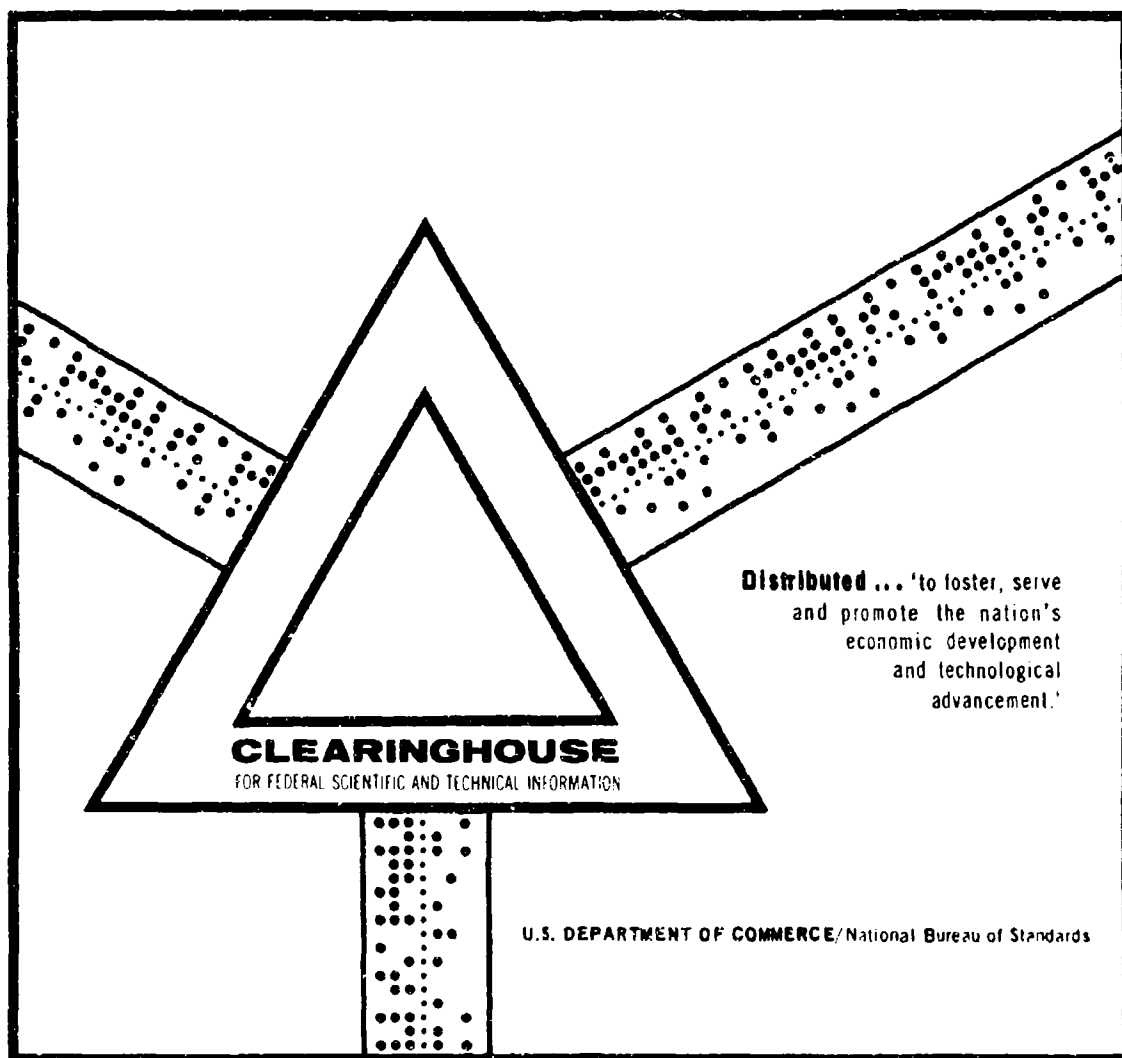
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REVIEW OF THE STUDY OF POLICY FORMATION

Yehezkel Dror

The Rand Corporation  
Santa Monica, California

October 1969



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EDITED BY RAYMOND A. BAUER AND KENNETH J. GERGEN

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REVIEW OF  
THE STUDY OF POLICY FORMATION

EDITED BY RAYMOND A. BAUER AND KENNETH J. GERGEN

New York: The Free Press, 1968 392 pp. \$9.95

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Prepared for publication in the American Political Science Review.

This is a landmark book in the study of public policymaking in the United States. Bringing together nine papers on the study of policymaking, the book surveys available knowledge, presents normative models, explores research methods, poses missions for the future, and provides concrete policy cases.

In the first chapter, the senior editor presents a general framework for the study of policymaking, and for the book. "Policy" being defined as "strategic moves that direct an organization's critical resources toward perceived opportunities in a changing environment" (p. 2), the study of policymaking should be concerned simultaneously with: (1) intellectual "decisionmaking" activities; (2) social-organizational policy-implementation processes; and (3) the dynamics of feedback and environmental change leading to policy revisions. Recognizing the limitations of available behavioral and normative models, Bauer proposes to study policy formation by fusing a social process view with a decisionmaking orientation, and puts forth a multidimensional research strategy, moving from systems survey and leverage points mapping to intense study of individual senior decisionmakers.

The next three chapters are devoted to surveys of available knowledge. Richard Zeckhauser and Elmer Shaefer provide a concise, inclusive and readable discussion of normative economic theory applications to public policy. The survey is innovative, for instance, in explicating its value assumptions, in discussing

the costs of information and of flexibility, and in dealing with redistribution benefits in addition to efficiency benefits. Joseph L. Bower presents an excellent discussion of organizational and group decision theory, with an original emphasis on the ability to improve performance rather than achieve a rigorous behavioral theory. Enid Curtis Bok Schoettle (the only political scientist among the ten authors) concludes the state-of-the-art surveys with an analysis of political science contributions, which is somewhat outdated - probably because of technical reasons.

The next two chapters by Kenneth J. Gergen deal with policymaking study methodologies. First, Gergen provides a three-dimensional model for the identification of leverage points, to be mapped by issue relevance, personal efficiency, and policy sub-phase. With the help of a variety of survey techniques, individuals are to be classified in terms of this model - individuals being regarded by Gergen (who is a psychologist) as the most important sub-unit of the policymaking system. The second methodological chapter provides an elementary discussion of basic research methods, which is perhaps out of place in the book as a whole, but which includes some important observations on the highly neglected study of individual high-leverage decisionmakers.

The case studies concluding the book deal with urban mass transportation (by Lewis M. Schneider), with technology transfer

from NASA to the civil economy (by Edward E. Furash) and with decisionmaking on foreign aid (by Theodore Geiger and Roger D. Hansen). Quite interesting by themselves and rounding out the book as a reflection of the contemporary study of policymaking, there is nevertheless little internal relation between these descriptive chapters and the rest of the book: The theoretic concepts and methodological recommendations of the first six chapters are not really utilized in the case studies, and the data presented in the last chapters are not relied upon in the first parts of the book. This is a weakness; but I think this weakness serves to illuminate the state of study of policymaking till very recently.

I started this review by calling this book a landmark. It is indeed a landmark in presenting most of what is known now and in indicating some of the needs for the future. Most of the book's weaknesses are faults of the contemporary study of policymaking - which cannot but break through despite the efforts of the editors. Two such main weaknesses are the tendency towards micro research and reductionism; and ambivalence on the relations between behavioral and normative approaches.

(1) Most parts of the book follow micro and reductionistic approaches to the study of policymaking, in which main emphasis is put on instances of incremental policymaking within a slowly changing situation. Social movements, aggressive ideologies, radical changes in conditions, survival issues, needs for

far-going innovations - all these phenomena, which by now are no longer strangers to the United States, cannot be perceived, analyzed and dealt with by the frameworks, models and methods available in the present study of policymaking as reflected in the book. Especially surprising in 1968, and nevertheless typical, is the statement by Schoettle that "dramatic breaks with the past such as the atomic bomb, or the space program... can be treated as random disturbances in the otherwise stable and incremental policy-making process, only momentarily producing a fluctuation in the old patterns of policymaking which quickly reassert themselves" (p. 119, emphasis added). It is such jumps which shape the whole policy-space and should be among the foci for study and improvement. But in order to deal with such happenings, policymaking must be regarded as a complex systems phenomena, with emphasis on the study and evaluation of the policymaking system as a whole and development of models for the improvement of meta-policy (that is, policies on how to make policies), including policymaking system redesign. And such an approach is difficult to reconcile with empiric study of micro situations, with incrementalism, and with economic model building.

(2) The strong desire of Bauer and some of the contributors to help in meeting the urgent needs of policymaking improvement are chained by the above mentioned limits of contemporary behavioral research methods on one hand and the narrow domain of

available normative models on the other hand. Bauer, seeing this dilemma, expresses high hopes for long-range improvements of practice while recognizing that all that the practitioners at best can get out from available knowledge "is...to deepen his comprehension of the range of problems with which he is accustomed to deal and thereby to help him to invent better solutions of his own" (p. 5). How to change our behavioral study of policymaking - these are questions posed by Bauer but not taken up in the other chapters of the book. Indeed, even some of the already available more relevant ideas - such as policy impact evaluation, explicit post factum and real time social experimentation, sequential decision models, alternative futures construction and strategic analysis methods - are not mentioned in the book, either as theoretic frameworks for innovative behavioral research or as approaches to policymaking and meta-policymaking improvement.

Even though there is only one political scientist among the ten authors (or, a cynic may say, because of that fact), this book should be carefully studied by the increasing number of political scientists worrying about how little our discipline has to contribute to better policymaking. Learning from the richness of what is included and its inadequacies, we still stand a chance of building up policy sciences - if we are ready to make the necessary jumps in our own concepts, methods and traditions. This book indicates that if political scientists lag behind, there is reason to hope that the necessary job may nevertheless be done by others.